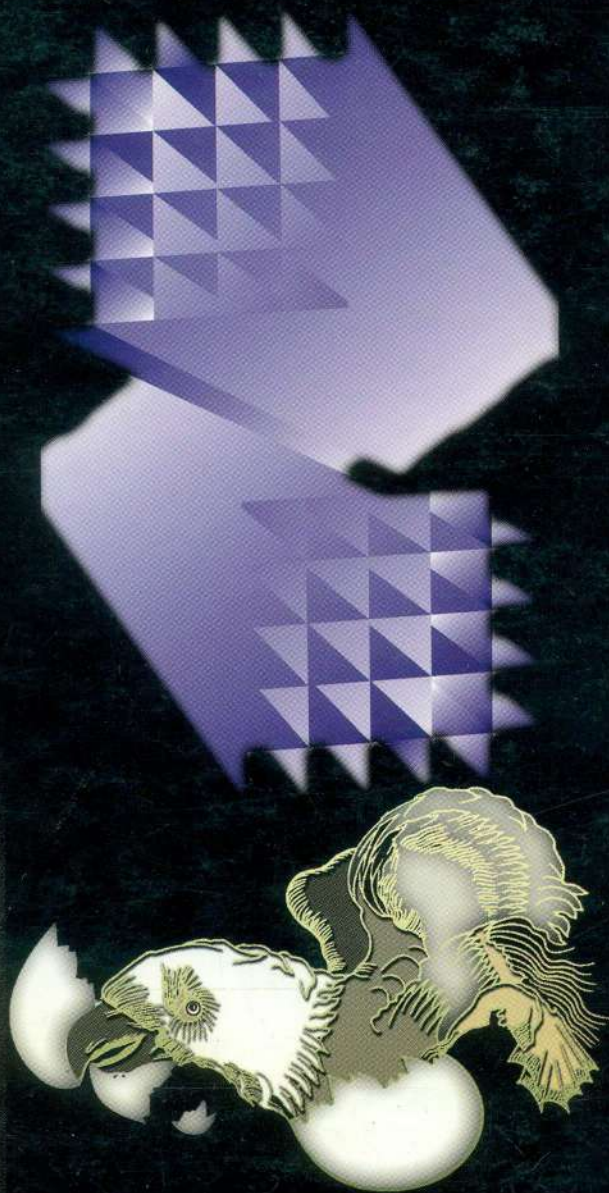


Folklore, Public Sphere and Civil Society



Edited by
M.D. Muthukumaraswamy
and Molly Kaushal

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Santiniketan: Birth of an Alternative Cultural Space

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Pulak Dutta

Rabindranath Tagore started his residential school at Santiniketan with five children on December 21, 1901. It was founded to create a free and fearless atmosphere for children to grow up in, in close contact with Nature. They were encouraged to grow as complete human beings. Gradually it became a community of students, teachers, workers, and occasional visitors. Santiniketan eventually came to mean a particular way of life. A dynamic community, constantly changing, incorporating, discovering, searching and suffering, Santiniketan never meant a fixed ideal. It was an alternative to, and a protest against, the colonial educational system and the contemporary way of life.

Reason, intelligence, and love played a major role in shaping the Santiniketan community. Rabindranath believed that there was a dialectical relationship between the private and the public, the personal and the social, between self-interest and love. To be able to integrate them into a harmonious whole is as difficult as it is beautiful.¹ And that is what is desirable.

The concept of the “public sphere”, we know from the works of different scholars, has always been problematic. It has had different connotations in different places and at different times. Terms like “public”, “public opinion”, “publicity”, “public sphere” have undergone several fundamental transformations, dictated—and validated—by structural changes in society. We know that different societies change differently: the birth and development of capitalism, for example, followed very different curves in Europe and in the colonies. It is evident that the creation and meaning of public sphere and its structural transformation has never been the same everywhere. Equally evident is the fact that “public sphere” now means exactly the opposite of what it originally meant. The most dangerous part of it is that, principally, we still use it in its original sense—we still use words like “public opinion” or “public space”—without realising that it has been rendered totally non-public. By and large, in a class-divided society the concept of “public” can rarely be generalised.

Santiniketan was an experiment in the field of culture and society and should be treated as such. And although I am aware of the ambivalent character of the concept of “public sphere” and the theoretical complexity of its understanding, “public sphere” will mean “the public use of reason”, public accessibility, public participation and therefore public authority in anything that concerns everybody in the community.² Freedom is the ability to use reason beyond self-interest. Going beyond self-interest does not imply losing

one's identity. In fact, the more one becomes oneself the more one opens up to the world. And the more we open up, the more we become public. So, there is a natural movement between the private and the public. At least, that has been the case in Santiniketan.

The most thorough analysis of the emergence, transformation and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere remains Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. (1962; trans.1991). McCarthy writes in the Introduction,

As a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed, the liberal public sphere took shape in the specific historical circumstances of a developing market economy. ... The emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented *before* the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse *by* the people.³

Habermas writes,

Our investigation is limited to the structure and function of the *liberal* model of the bourgeois public sphere, to its emergence and transformation. Thus it refers to those features of a historical constellation that attains dominance and leaves aside the *plebeian* public sphere as a variant that in a sense was suppressed in a historical process. [1991: xviii]⁴

In India nationalism proper began in 1885 with the formation of the Indian National Congress. Prior to that was a period of social reform, of collaborating with the colonial regime. Partha Chatterjee shows how nationalism created its own domain of sovereignty within the colonial society by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—one was the material/political, the other was spiritual/cultural before it began its political battle with the imperial power. It established its sovereignty in the cultural domain much before it gained political sovereignty. The cultural domain was based on difference and resistance—different from the Western. Colonial power was not allowed to intervene in this domain. The political domain—economy, statecraft, law, etc.—was based on uniformity. Uniformity was demanded of the colonial power in its treatment of Western and Indian public.

Here, unlike in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the public sphere in the political domain, and its literary precursors in the debating societies and learned bodies, did not emerge out of the discursive construction of a social world peopled by "individuals". Nor was there an "audience-oriented subjectivity", by which the new conjugal family's intimate domain became publicly transparent and thus consistent with and amenable to the discursive controls of the public sphere in the political domain(.)...

... the domain of the "national" was defined as one that was different from the "Western." The new subjectivity that was constructed here was premised not on a conception of universal humanity, but rather on particularity and difference: the identity of the "national" community as against other communities(.)... The search for a postcolonial modernity has been tied, from its very birth, with its struggle against modernity. [Chatterjee 1995: 74, 75]⁵

But there is a major difference between being non-Western and being a modern Indian. In most instances, being non-Western implied rejecting anything Western. There were exceptions: Rabindranath's opposition to nationalism is well known. He believed that it would inevitably breed fundamentalism. In my opinion, Santiniketan created a space that developed a cultural practice which is modern and recognisably Indian yet receptive to any cultural heritage—Western, Far Eastern, popular or folk.

Before we go into the details of what was happening in the early days at Santiniketan, it is important to look at 19th century Bengal. The people who came together to build an alternative community at Santiniketan carried this tradition and made use of elements from it relevant to their experiment.

Kolkata

With the founding and the growth of Kolkata City, clearly, a new, city-centred or market-oriented culture was born. The new market converted culture into commodity, thereby playing a singular role in the democratisation of culture and in establishing the public as, in principle, inclusive. With the introduction of English education in India and the establishment of colleges of different kinds, a new educated/intellectual Bengali middle-class was born⁶. With the emergence of the new market and a new generation of English-educated Bengali elite, institutions for public discussion were formed. The colonial ruler never treated public opinion impartially as an undifferentiated body. Public opinion for the coloniser meant only the opinion of the European community in India. English language newspapers began to be published in Kolkata from the 1780s. The vernacular press—a carrier of native public opinion and a platform for rational-critical public discussion—was treated differently and the Vernacular Press Act was implemented in 1878. Around the last part of the 18th century, debating societies and clubs, mostly run by the Europeans started appearing in and around Kolkata. The most important of these was the Asiatic Society, established on January 15, 1784 by Sir William Jones. In the first meeting, '[t]hirty gentlemen attended and they represented the elite of the European community in Calcutta at the time'. Jones declared, 'Whether you will enrol as members any number of learned Natives you will hereafter decide'. From the beginning of the 19th century many educated Bengalis began establishing such societies. The first such Bengali society was Rammohan Roy's Atmiya Sabha, established in 1815.⁷⁷

On May 18, 1819, the *Calcutta Journal* described one of its meetings held on 9 May 1819 as follows—'(In) The meeting in question, it is said, the absurdity of the prevailing rules respecting the intercourse of several castes with each other, and on restriction on diet etc. was freely discussed, and generally admitted—the necessity of an infant widow passing her life in a state of celibacy—the practice of Polygamy and of suffering widows to burn with the corpse of their husbands, were condemned—as well as all the superstitious ceremonies in use among idolaters...' (*Calcutta Journal*, Vol.3) Some of the other important societies of the 19th century Kolkata were Academic Association, Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge and *Tattwabodhini Sabha*. The activities of these societies were not limited to debating and the press only. Libraries and reading societies were also established. Other forms of culture like literature, drama, music and painting practiced by this new class in a new environment also took new shapes. Indian subject matters were narrated through European construction and technique.

Kolkata's 'other culture'

But there was more to the story of Kolkata's cultural and social life. At another node flourished the "other" or the folk culture of Kolkata. When three villages—Sutanoti, Gobindopur and Dihi Kolkata—were in the process of being transformed into a modern city called Kolkata (from the mid 18th to the beginning of 19th century), many people moved to Kolkata from nearby villages to earn their livelihood⁸. They came with their cultural practices and were involved in conducting festivals like the Charak, Jatra, Panchali, and Kobigan. Although these forms had undergone minor changes to adapt to the new location, audience and ambience, they remained fundamentally Bengali folk in their construction. They had their own logic of construction and ways of using reason. The most popular among them was Kobigan—an extempore debate in song and poetry. Though the themes and topics were often mythological, they were made relevant to the immediate context. They reflected the image of the new society and occasionally were even critical of it. An important fact in this early phase of Kolkata's "other culture" was that these festivals were attended as much by the working class as by the rich and educated.

A Kali temple was founded in Kalighat in 1809. Soon a market grew around it to cater to the needs of worshippers coming to the temple. Along with many others the *Patuas* also came and started living there. Besides, paintings of gods and goddesses they also sold paintings on social themes. Their patrons were ordinary people of the lower class. Much of their depiction of the new urban society was rich in critical elements. The school of Kalighat Pat Painting was aesthetically exceptional and publicly accessible. The *Patuas* used watercolour and newsprint—both European—yet they remained distinctively Bengali folk in language and in their approach to the world around. The advantage of music, theatre and visual arts is that, unlike the printed word, which is the prerogative of literate, it can address a large number of people—both literate and illiterate.

Around the same time, in the 1820s, a large number of printing presses came up in and around Shobhabazar. Popularly known as the "Bat-tala Press", they soon started producing countless books. It even boasted of a daily production of books—not unlike bulletins—narrating recent important events. They were very often illustrated with woodcut prints (an electrotpe block prepared from the original woodcut block—both European in technique, sometimes hand painted) by artists, most of whom came from lower classes or castes. These artists produced a very special image and language with a special kind of cutting.

This was the milieu in which Rabindranath Tagore was born and brought up.

Non-urban Bengal

Now, if we look at the cultural and social life of non-urban Bengal, we find some striking traditions of public culture—of cultural space created by public. Take for instance the case of the *Patuas*. They go from house to house, from one gathering to another, with their scroll painting displaying their painting frame by frame and narrating them with songs of a very simple melodic and rhythmic structure. The work of art in this case is not site-specific. It is extended to affect an unlimited area of physical space in principle.⁹ There are other forms of rituals or festivals with similar characteristics. Gambhira of

Malda, Birbhum's Bhadu, Bishnupur's Jhapan and Holi, Dharam Puja of Goalpara (a village near Santiniketan). Some of these festivals are even funded by the public.

But the movement that shook almost entire non-urban 19th century Bengal was probably the emergence of *Baul* and countless religious sub-sects. Their central concern was Man/Humanity and the individual human being. Rejecting all control from above—religions, scriptures, state, feudal lord—they believed in direct experiences and in *reason*. Thus, the human body became for them the prime object of investigation. But for the Baul, an investigation into the body cannot, and should never, be divorced from a meditation on the human consciousness. These roaming minstrels met in fairs—*Baul-Melas*—exchanged ideas with their peers, held debating sessions, sang songs and meditated. This tradition still continues. There are large, corporate/government-funded Baul-Melas which attract tourists by the hordes, but there are also gatherings which still retain their autonomy.

The most original thinker of the movement certainly was Fakir Lalon Sain. Nothing is known about the origin of this great mystic, but we know, from a report published in the fortnightly *Hitkari* edited by Mir Musharaf Hossain, that he died in 1890. He lived in his *ashram* at Chheuria, Kushtia, among the poor and the outcastes. He had a large number of followers from vast areas of rural Bengal. He was not the founder of a new religion: he just lived an alternative life. So it was a particular way of life, rather than a religious gospel, that his teachings contained. Lalon's life and teachings disprove the popular belief that without being born in an economically sound family, without proper/formal city-centred education, without being in touch with modern Western thought one cannot be original, creative, rational or courageous enough to fight against injustice. We find in this illiterate and unpropertied villager an original, intelligent and creative mind. He is also one of the greatest thinkers of the age. A Bengali scholar remarked, what Rammohan Roy was to the urban elite Lalon was to the huge mass of non-urban subaltern.

By the time Rabindranath started his school at Santiniketan, he was already an established poet, writer, and composer. He was familiar with the cultural atmosphere outlined above. He himself was a part of the new Bengali elite and was seriously involved in the new cultural practices. He had lived in different parts of India, spent time in Europe, and lived among the poor villagers in his ancestral Silaidaha estate; and the time spent at Silaidaha was perhaps the most creative period in his life. He was deeply respectful of the teachings of Lalon, and had spent considerable amount of time with his followers discussing their worldview. Therefore, he had first hand knowledge and understanding of different cultural traits prevailing in 19th century Bengal and Europe as well.

Santiniketan

Santiniketan attempted to produce a culture, which was Bengali/Indian in its construction and approach yet significant to the modern world. Without losing its local identity it incorporated elements from the whole tradition of human knowledge and its manifestations. Santiniketan was different from the culture of Kolkata and the traditional folk culture of Bengal. Nor did it follow the nationalist path, which rejected anything alien. Santiniketan created a third space not by rejecting but by creating a conscious alternative. It was Indian, modern, original and not without consequences. By revisiting

Santiniketan we will see how repeated attempts were made to use reason, intelligence and love to turn Santiniketan into a real public sphere.

Right from the beginning there was a spirit of self-governance and democracy. But in 1912 Rabindranath established a unique institution called Ashram-Sammilani.¹⁰ It was a body of elected students—very often misunderstood as a student union—with teachers-in-charge to look after the functioning of the school. Students' Unions are primarily concerned with student interest; they—or any other union, for that matter—are formed to protect their rights against the authority's misuse of power. In this case, all the teachers and students were its members and their central concern was the school or the *ashram*. There was even a court run by the elected student-body. Whenever there was a complaint of any serious offence, the court had its session with the accused in some quiet place after dinner. The Sammilani met twice a month—once on new-moon nights, the other on full-moon nights. New-moon sessions dealt with problems of functioning: students discussed, debated and resolved problems by voting. Full-moon sessions consisted of songs, music and recitations.¹¹ This institution is still active today in Patha-Bhavana but it has undergone changes. During Rabindranath's long stay at Silaidaha among the villagers he realised that only self-sufficiency, self-rule and self-respect could free our rural population from their weakness, poverty and sense of inferiority; that it was society that should rule, not the state imported from Europe. And when he came in touch with the idea of the co-operative movement, he realised that this was what he had been looking for, for such a long time. Patisar Krishi Bank was a co-operative bank of the villagers. Rabindranath started this with a village parliament in 1905 among the villagers in his estate at Silaidaha.¹² Sriniketan—Visva-Bharati's rural development/reconstruction programme—started in 1922. Rabindranath applied the principles of the co-operative movement to Sriniketan; and as we know he applied it everywhere—equal respect for everybody, equal participation, equal distribution of material and spiritual wealth.

There were forums for academic discussions from the early stage of Santiniketan. The first of its kind probably was Sayang Sabha of 1905. All the teachers met every evening. They discussed literature, social sciences and politics.¹³ In 1911 Prabandha Path Sabha was born where papers were presented on literature and sciences and discussed by specialists.¹⁴ Students' Sahitya Sabha was a regular practice from April 1910. Students read out their articles, stories, and poems and sang songs.

Pandit Bidhushekhara Shastri joined the school in 1905 as a Sanskrit teacher. He believed that old Sanskrit *toles* and *chatuspathis* had lost their relevance in contemporary society. Keeping our own education and knowledge as the fundamental basis, we had to study other streams of knowledge produced by human beings everywhere in the world, if not our education would be untrue and incomplete. Rabindranath considered that the primary function of universities was the production of knowledge; distribution of it was only secondary. And only by rejecting European culture did we make our weakness and poverty look ridiculous and irritating.¹⁵ Thus the idea of Visva-Bharati was born. It was formally launched in 1921 with the departments of Fine Arts, Music and Higher Studies.

Visva-Bharati Sammelani started holding its meetings from March 30, 1921. Almost all the sessions were held in Kala-Bhavana after dinner. A wide range of academic topics were presented and debated. All the sessions used to start with a song—Hindustani,

bhajan or Rabindrasangit—solo or chorus. The session held on December 16, 1923, for example, consisted only of music—veena, esraj, Hindustani vocal, *bhajan*, Rabindrasangit and so on.¹⁶ This Sammelani continued to be active for a long time.

Around 1938/39 Rabindranath wrote,

We have taken the responsibility to publish *Lokoshiksha Pathyagrantha* in a series in simple Bangla, avoiding technical terms as far as possible. To spread knowledge among the Bangla reading general people is its goal. ...It is necessary to study sciences to keep our intelligence free of sentimentality and illusion.

Visva-Bharati published these books for a long time covering a wide range of subjects like Literature, Pure Sciences, Religion, Linguistics, Anthropology, Visual Arts, Philosophy, Statistics, Social Sciences and so on. The books were priced very low and were written by scholars who were experts in the subject. Different kinds of magazines, bulletins, reports and journals also were published on regular basis. Scholars from Santiniketan participated in debates initiated by magazines published from Kolkata. It was not just a group of people involved in academics, not just production of knowledge; it was making this knowledge easily available to the ordinary people and readily accessible to the public.

Festivals and fairs were two forms of public culture that modern culture workers hardly explored. Santiniketan explored them quite passionately. All the festivals and fairs organised at Santiniketan were secular in character and approach. Taken out from its religious basis Santiniketan established them in the modern social context. Festivals/fairs can use real physical space quite effectively. They create a space for a variety of people to come together, interact, and have dialogue with one another and with nature and society. Successful festivals/fairs organically form a sphere, which has public authority. Amlan Dutta says,

Think of the festivals [Rabindranath thought of]. It is natural that different religions have different ceremonies. But one problem remains – different communities have different communal festivals. Everybody cannot participate equally in them. Yet Rabindranath wanted a kind of festival, which had the joy (*ananda*) of coming together – man with man and man with the universe. Beyond the faith in their respective religion, people of all religions and sects can participate in it. Rabindranath introduced festivals of that kind. He found the solution so easily. Closeness to Nature made it easier. The cycle of seasonal changes follow the law of Nature. There can be seasonal festivals – *Basantotsab* (Spring festival), *Sharodotsab* (Autumn festival), *Barshamongol* (Monsoon festival). No one can have any resistance in participating if the form of festivals is like this. Think of it. Human beings need festivals, yet they should be of a kind that does not alienate one community from the other. Every human being can participate in it as human beings. Participate in the festivals where the union of man and Nature, universal Nature is celebrated.¹⁷

It is well known that quite a lot of festivals were celebrated in Santiniketan throughout the year. The first festival that took place here was Paush Utsav in 1890—religious festival also called Brahmotsav. The fourth annual Paush Utsav in 1894 introduced a fair as a part of the festival. With the local people putting up stalls and selling their wares, there was also Jatra performances and a fireworks display after the evening prayer. But

the most successful festivals were the seasonal festivals. They were totally secular festivals through which the whole community participated in the process of seasonal changes. They invited and celebrated the seasons. On January 18, 1907, Rabindranath's youngest son Shamindranath took the initiative to organise a spring festival. Students decorated with flowers and leaves enacted the seasons spring, monsoon and autumn. Seasonal poems in Sanskrit, Bangla and English were recited. Next year Rabindranath asked Kshitimohan Sen to organise a monsoon festival. A platform of the *parjanya devata* (cloud god) was decorated. Pieces from Ramayan, Kalidas, Rabindranath and other poets describing the monsoon were read. Songs celebrating the monsoon composed by Vaishnava poets were sung. Rabindranath could not be present for both these festivals but their description enthused him so much that he immediately started writing a drama to celebrate autumn. This is probably how he started composing seasonal songs. Quite a lot of autumn songs were composed that year to be a part of the drama *Sharodotsav*.¹⁸ Many other festivals have been introduced since then. Some celebrate the flow of life, Nature's fertility and ever-recurring youth; some celebrate seasons, the Bangla New Year, even the annual convocation—*Samabartan Utsav*—was a festival. Two new festivals were introduced in 1928—*Briksha Ropon* (tree planting) and *Halakarshan* (ploughing).

A pavilion has been erected in front of the junior boys' hostel. Girls, beautifully dressed, accompanied the little *Bakul* sapling, which was carried in a palanquin by two young men. Conch shells were blown and songs sung. Vidhushekhar Sastri recited Sanskrit mantras, after which the poet and five girls (personifying Earth, Water, Energy, Wind and Sky) recited appropriate verses. The young sapling was then ceremonially planted. At the end of this ceremony a *mangalika* or auspicious prayer was recited by the poet for the sapling.¹⁹ (Bhadra 1335,1928)

On the next day, the ploughing festival took place in Sriniketan.

Pandit Vidhushekhar Sastri said that it was called *Sitayagna* in ancient time. The place for the festival was prepared under a beautiful canopy. A part of the ground was made grass-free and decorated with colours for the ploughing. Farmers kept three pairs of painted healthy bulls and a decorated plough in front of the pavilion. Rabindranath sang a song at the beginning and Vidhushekhar Sastri recited Sanskrit mantras after that. ...Then the bulls were garlanded and given different types of fodder to eat. Ploughing took place accompanied by the recitation of Sanskrit mantras.²⁰ (Bhadra 1335,1928)

On the one hand, these festivals created a space for everyone to come out of their privacy and meet others to do something collectively. On the other, they created a platform for culture—be it poetry, Vedic chanting, music-dancing or decorating—to become a place to live in, instead of an object to consume.

Art and life never meant two different things for Nandalal Bose, Suren Kar and their students who planned the decoration of the festivals with amazing mastery and creativity. The way they used locally available and unconventional materials—brick, wet sand, hay, cow dung, grains, leaves, buds, flowers, etc.—and their incorporation of elements from Vedic and folk cultural forms is extraordinary. Visual elements normally create the ambience whereas music has a quality of direct emotional communication. Rabindranath himself was one the greatest composers of all time. Many of the songs he composed for

this purpose were simple enough for everybody to sing and the whole community did sing together as it does even today. Those who have been there know the tremendous sense of participation that it is capable of producing.

Quite a lot of published material is available on the beginnings and the teaching methods of Kala-Bhavana. I will discuss only two areas of its activities. It was in Kala-Bhavana that some serious experimentation took place to develop a modern art language. Nandalal's model was not only the classical tradition of India; he took lessons from the vast tradition of folk and popular arts of the country. In the early stage of Kala-Bhavana, students took lessons from traditional craftsmen. Rupchand Guin from Ilambazar used to teach lacquer craft, Shukla, a Santali teacher used to teach bookbinding, and much later Narsinghalal, a traditional craftsman, was invited to come and teach the technique of Jaipuri fresco. Arrangements were made to keep students in touch with modern Western thought and art practices. Stella Kramrisch joined Kala-Bhavana in 1921 and her classes were compulsory for all teachers and students. She started her lecture with Gothic Art. She analysed and discussed art and artists from Impressionism to Cubism in Santiniketan at the time when Indian artist community was not familiar with the new aim, the aesthetic principle and technique of contemporary European art. Artists from Japan, with the knowledge of traditional techniques, taught Kala-Bhavana artists. Artists from Kala-Bhavana visited China and Japan to study their traditional art forms. As a result a new art language was developed which was capable of communicating to a wide range of the public. "Art" was freed from its exclusivity and made accessible to the public. Contemporary professional art of India owes a lot to the Kala-Bhavana experiment.

The other area is the experiment with architecture, mural and environmental sculpture. 'Interrelating art and life and extending art into the environment were persistent preoccupation of Nandalal and his followers. ...They [murals] are not just paintings or relief on the wall; they generate in the building or its surroundings a new kind of vitality. Their role, therefore, is organic, not ornamental.'²¹ Looking at the most successful murals and environmental sculptures at Santiniketan is fundamentally different from the experience of visiting a museum or a gallery. Conscious attempts were also made to keep a flow of aesthetic sensibility in the objects of daily use—designing printed programmes for function and festivals, furniture, garden, ornament made of simple and locally available materials, book designing and illustration.

Public art is very often misunderstood as any work of art situated in a public place. From our experience we know that many murals and sculptures situated in public places are so sharply focused and framed—even in later murals at Santiniketan—that they give you an experience not very different from being in a museum. They are non-environmental or anti-environmental and occasionally counter-environmental. Art becomes public only when they become a part of the public life. Environmental sculptures, architecture and murals were an integrated part of the nature and society at Santiniketan and therefore essentially were a part of public life.

I have picked out a few instances of cultural activities at Santiniketan and missed out more than I have discussed. I am in no way trying to suggest that it remained a properly democratic community. Santiniketan, right from the beginning went through a lot of suffering, experienced nasty kinds of domination and subordination, but there were moments of success. It did successfully create an alternative culture.

Visva-Bharati: A central university

Rabindranath died in 1941 and Visva-Bharati was declared a central university in 1951. With Rabindranath's death the rule from the top gradually started setting in. It was ruled by some powerful persons and by Rabindranath himself who became an object of perpetual consumption, but was never seriously debated. And with the creation of the Visva-Bharati Act it is now ruled by the central government and its bureaucrats. All the festivals have turned into lifeless yearly rituals, decorated like sub-urban wedding party *pandals*. Courses and appointments follow UGC rules. The Santiniketan School is one hundred years old and Visva-Bharati completed its 50th year as a central university in 2001. Visva-Bharati has not yet initiated any serious discussion on the direction and philosophy of this institution in the context of the changed circumstances. Kala-Bhavana which, in my opinion, made the most significant contribution to modern Indian culture exists today without any conscious direction or philosophy, nor has it taken any steps towards a serious critical discussion of the direction it should take. Patha-Bhavana had organised a national seminar on "Rabindranath's Philosophy of Education and Secondary Education" from July 4–6, 1993, but like everything else it was also only consumed. It had no effect whatsoever on the functioning of Patha-Bhavana.

To discuss the transformation "from a culture-debating public to a culture-consuming public" is not within the scope of this paper but it should be enlightening to all those interested in public sphere in the world of culture.

Notes

¹ Rabindranath Thakur, 'Swatantrter Porinam': *Dharma*.

² The term "public sphere" is a usage in a culture where individuals regard themselves as essentially private beings. Thus, when individuals relinquish their isolation, whether voluntarily or due to the necessity of a situation, whether temporarily or for a longer period of time, when they are thrown together to form a mass which, though suddenly anonymous, begins to feel, think and act like a large amorphous creature—then these individuals begin to talk of the "public sphere". In this sense, the original German word "Öffentlichkeit" is a more appropriate description of that state of being than the term "public", for the latter, derived from the Latin *pubes* (adult, mature), refers to a group of adults (mature persons capable of thinking and acting autonomously; in German and in Kantian Enlightenment *mundig*) consciously and consensually forming a republican community where all things are shared, where the private domain is, if not totally absent, an extended function of the public domain. On the other hand, the German word "Öffentlichkeit", derived from the adjective *offen* (open), is at once a more neutral term and stresses, by virtue of its peculiar coinage, on the feeling of being out in the open, as though without shelter and protection ... Romit Roy, *Bildung, Kultur, and Kulturindustrie: Determinants of the Public Sphere*. Unpublished paper. 2002.

³ Thomas McCarthy, *Introduction; The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1991.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1991. Preface: XVIII

⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1995.

⁶ Fort William College was established in 1800, Hindu College in 1817 and Sanskrit College in 1824.

⁷ a. *Academic Association* of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, established in 1827–28. An association of intelligent and revolutionary young people known as the "Young Bengal". The public had access (*in principle*) to the Association's discussions through its bulletin, *The Parthenon*—until it was banned by the Hindu College authority.

b. *Sadharan Gnanoparijika Sabha* (Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge) 1838. Its president was Tarachand Chakraborti and its secretaries were Ramtanu Lahiri and Pyarichand Mitra. They were attentive to the study of local interest.

c. *Tattwabodhini Sabha*, founded by Debendranath Tagore on October 6, 1839 at his ancestral house in Jorasanko. The Sabha used to hold weekly and monthly meetings. Papers were read and discussed. Though they invited the study of European knowledge, it was not their only concern. They were deeply involved in the study of indigenous culture and tradition. They published a bulletin called *Tattwabodhini Patrika*.

⁸ From 1710 to 1752 the population of Kolkata increased from 10/12 thousand to 4 lakhs and by the end of 1790 it had reached 6 lakhs.

⁹ Dukhushyam Chitrakar's *Ban-Pat* is one of such kind. There was a dreadful flood in West-Bengal in 1978. Medinipur district was one of the worst affected areas. A large part of West Bengal was under water for about four months. This *Pat* is about his direct experience of this devastating flood. Nothing escapes his observation—the role of DVC; the politics of distribution of relief and its connection with the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister; helicopter; steam launch and of course *Ma Ganga*. (See Aditinath Sarkar, *Banpat: Gan Ebong Pala*. Yogasutra, Vol.3. Issue2. Kolkata, Oct.-Dec.1993.)

¹⁰ Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindrajibani*, Vol.2, Kolkata, 1975.

¹¹ Pramathanath Bishi.

¹² Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindrajibani*, Vol. 2, Kolkata 1975.

¹³ Prashantakumar Pal, *Rabijibani*, Vol. 5, Kolkata, 1990. 300.

¹⁴ Prashantakumar Pal, *Rabijibani*, Vol.6, Kolkata, 1993. 211.

¹⁵ Rabindranath Thakur, *Visva-Bharati*.

¹⁶ From the list of papers presented in the first year we can make some surmises about the depth of knowledge and wide ranging scholarship: 1. *Shiksha-r Milan*: Rabindranath Thakur 2. The Relationship between Indian and European Visual Art: Asit Kumar Halder 3. The Necessity of Art: Asit Kumar Halder 4. The Genesis of the Word 'Shudra': Bidhushekar Shastri 5. History of Indian Art: Manindrabhushan Gupta 6. Poverty in India (English): Phanindranath Basu 7. *Bangali Arya Kina*: Phanindranath Basu 8. Message of the Poet (English): Lakshman Rao 9. Id Festival: Sayad Mujtaba Ali 10. South Indians—Their Manners and Customs (English): R. Ramaiya Naidu

¹⁷ Amlan Dutta, Tape recorded speech delivered in Kolkata, 2001. (My translation.)

¹⁸ Prashantakumar Pal, *Rabijibani* Vol.6, Kolkata, 1993. 23-27.

¹⁹ *Tree Planting Ceremony in Santiniketan*, Exhibition at Rabindra Bhavana, Santiniketan, 1984. 'Some festivals that are popular among different religious sects are related to the seasons—e.g. *Holi* is a spring festival. Nowadays the relationship between man and Nature is not preserved and felt in these festivals. Many festivals of this type have become mere meaningless rituals. In Santiniketan the seasonal festivals that Rabindranath introduced have still not been reduced to mere ritualistic activities. In the vast landscape of Santiniketan the different seasons can be seen and felt deeply. Nature dons new garments in different seasons and through the changing light and colour of the sky, in its various images and sounds, it manifests itself to man. ... The presence of sensitive artists transforms the festivals and programmes to an aesthetic experience that expensive and extravagant effort is incapable of producing elsewhere.' *Prabasi: Bhadra 1335* (1928). Translation—Rati Basu.

²⁰ *Prabasi: Bhadra, 1335*, (1928). (My translation.)

²¹ K. G. Subramanyam, 'Foreword', *The Santiniketan Murals*. Calcutta, 1995.